

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director		Executive Registry 68-1731/1
<p>The Board decided this morning that a SNIE on Vietnam had better lie fallow for a while. But here is a short piece written by [ ] with which the Board essentially agrees. We recommend no further distribution.</p> <p>The Board also believes that the developing situation in Saigon is probably more important and certainly harder to estimate than are the reactions of Hanoi. We may have a paper on the Saigon question in a few more days.</p>		
cc: DDCI DD/I	[ ] ABBOT SMITH Director National Estimates (DATE) 2 Apr 68	

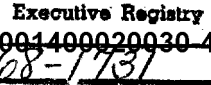
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OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

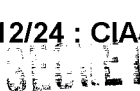
2 April 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Hanoi's Reactions to President Johnson's 31 March  
Statement - Some Preliminary Thoughts

1. Despite the cumulative strains of the prolonged conflict, Hanoi is almost certainly not prepared at this time to negotiate any solution except one giving them effective control of South Vietnam. They are unlikely to view the President's 31 March statement as holding out the prospect of such solution; rather they will probably see it as a ploy forced on the Administration by their own protracted struggle and by US critics of the war. Thus, there is little hope that the President's actions of 31 March will cause Hanoi to restrict its military efforts in South Vietnam.

2. For several weeks, the Communists have been engaged in intensive preparations for a "second round" offensive in South Vietnam. These preparations have included unprecedented





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efforts in the North to aid the fighting forces in the field. We are almost certain that these efforts will continue, but the pressure to complete the buildup in the South before the possible arrival of large-scale US reinforcements has been removed by the President's speech. Thus, the anticipated large-scale offensive may come in mid-summer rather than in April-May.

3. Hanoi will have to give some thought to its reaction to the bombing restriction; it must consider the impact on the US public and on its Soviet and Chinese friends. It may adopt a "reasonable" posture on negotiations, pointing out that it, too, favors peace but cannot engage in talks until all bombing is stopped. But any such reactions will be purely tactical; they will not alter the main thrust of Communist strategy which will continue for some time to be the destruction of the GVN/ARVN by military, political, and psychological means.

4. Hanoi will attempt to make the most of the President's speech to undermine confidence and fighting spirit in South Vietnam and to pressure the US for further concessions. It will certainly encourage the view in South Vietnam that further resistance is fruitless, and that the US is preparing to withdraw if not before the election then certainly after it.

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5. There are other, more intricate, calculations that Hanoi may review, but we doubt that any of these will greatly affect Communist strategy. For example, Hanoi may consider that a failure to respond positively to the President's speech will discredit the "peace forces" in the US and produce a strong reaction in the US public favoring large-scale escalation. To the extent this is a concern, Hanoi probably feels the problem can be coped with by a response which in appearance is not entirely negative. Once the "second round" attack is underway, the Communists probably believe it will be too late militarily, and the US mood too far gone psychologically, to reverse course toward escalation.

6. Hanoi might also consider that its best course was to avoid any substantial military effort until after the US elections, perhaps entering into lengthy "talks about talks" in the meantime. But relying on changes in the US leadership to produce a decisive result in Vietnam simply seems out of character for Hanoi. Their Marxist training and their Geneva experience have convinced them that only a favorable military situation permits successful negotiations.



7. From their point of view, a favorable military situation does not yet obtain; but they expect to achieve it over the next several months.



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